

REMARKS

ON THE

HARBOUR OF QUEBEC

BY AN OBSERVER

NOT A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF TRADE.

Dedicated to those interested in the welfare and prosperity
of Quebec.

QUEBEC :
PRINTED BY AUGUSTIN COTÉ & Co.
1861.

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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In view of the great political and commercial changes which are now taking place on this continent, it will not be deemed an intrusion if we devote some little time to the examination of our position in Quebec and request at the same time that the community will carefully weigh the subjects of which we shall speak before it allows erroneous impressions to be formed, which, however correct as regards individual benefit, must be prejudicial to the general interests of the mass.

The secession from the Union of some of the southern states and the consequent alteration of their commercial relations has already caused the imposition of a toll upon merchandise descending the Mississippi for shipment at New-Orleans, this toll would have the decided effect of causing the Western

States either to join the seceding ones and so remove the toll, or to reduce their amount of production and so destroy their prosperity, were it not that the Western States have other and in some respects much better routes for their products to the Ocean.

The Southern States, from the fact of their secession, are now, as regards the Western, foreign states, and as business cannot be carried on by them as one people, it is socially of small consequence who the foreigners are with whom it is transacted. The route from the West to the Atlantic seaboard through the intermediate and friendly states is long, expensive, and from its already crowded condition subject to delays, and will require some time before it can be so enlarged as to do the business it already has with sufficient despatch, hence the products of the West must seek some other channel by which to reach the Ocean.

The great Lakes and the River St. Lawrence offer a third and available route from the producing states of the West to the Ocean, and it is to the necessity for encouraging and developing the facilities and advantages of this « great highway » that the attention of all true Canadians is solicited.

That the advantages which the St. Lawrence route offers are to a certain extent already appreciated we collect from the returns published by the « Board of Trade of Chicago, » that this appreciation would be very greatly encreased were the trade facilities encreased, we may safely infer, by trade facilities, basins warehouses and elevators are understood. These facilities are now being actually supplied in all the important towns and cities of the upper part of this Province, at Sarnia, Collingwood, Hamilton, the Welland, Toronto and Montreal, and these facilities are beyond a doubt indispensable at Quebec. If all the towns mentioned above have found it absolutely necessary to have such facilities in order either to keep, increase or make a trade for the public benefit, and in order to maintain their position in the general advance of the

Province, with the drawback to which they are all more or less exposed, of being only on the route to the Ocean, how much more should it become obligatory on the citizens, who reside at the actual sea-port itself, to bestir themselves and by so doing obtain their just share of the advantages derivable from increased trade and commerce.

Montreal, although 180 milles further from salt water, has long been aware of the importance of this route between the Atlantic and the West, and has for years past been steadily and perseveringly pursuing such a course as would secure to her basins and piers a share of the advantages of its adoption, and is at this moment straining every nerve to enlarge her accommodations and increase her trade facilities, and this against obstacles and impediments which might well daunt less energetic and determined men, surely with such examples before them the proprietors of Quebec should arouse themselves, and enter the lists as competitors for the prize, which sooner or later must be awarded to the St. Lawrence route.

Trade facilities mentioned above, consist in good and safe berths for vessels either seagoing or river and lake craft, without such it is in vain to look for the increased arrival of either of the above or indeed of any kind of vessel. It should therefore be the duty of those who desire the prosperity of Quebec to aid in obtaining such accommodation.

In this case, as in many others, private interests interfere with the public requirements, and owners of wharves and piers now in existence declaim against improvement for the general good—not because improvements are not imperatively demanded, but because the improvements do not embrace the purchase of their wharves in the first instance.

It will be well, at this point, to examine the state of the existing wharves and piers in the Port of Quebec and see what actual amount of accommodation they are capable of supplying to ships requiring berths.

Commencing at Alford's wharf or pier, which is the upper

one of the present business part of the port, and measuring down to the corner of the India wharf, contiguous to the new Custom House, there is found to be a distance of 1257 feet, and this comprises the present Port of Quebec as regards general merchandize, that is, if the assertion of the present wharf owners or holders is to be credited. Having the distance in figures how many berths and what amount of accommodation does it afford.

Begin with Alford's, the most valuable pier on the river, for it affords berths for two vessels to be afloat at low water.

Next in order is Gillespies,—here only one vessel can lie and that across the end, a very narrow and uneasy berth, this is usually a steamers berth.

Next Gibbs,—here as before there is but one berth.

Atkinson has a berth across the end, usually occupied and reserved for the Lady Head.

Leaycraft has one berth, and lastly there is a berth at the India wharf.

In the whole Port of Quebec, using the word port as the wharf owners use it, there are but five available berths where ships can remain afloat at all times of tide drawing 18 feet water, whereas in the port of Montreal there are berths for 22 vessels, of over 18 feet draught of water, where they can lie secure alongside the wharves and piers.

With such a fact before them is it matter of surprise that ship owners should prefer to pay the cost of sending their vessels to Montreal in preference to running the risk of allowing them to lie across the end of a pier in a tideway and exposed to the frequent gusts of wind from the N. and N. E. to which they are exposed, or to the alternative of getting a cargo whilst lying in the stream by the expensive and tedious process of lighterage.

In the month of June last, it was observed that the wharves were covered with coal to the absolute exclusion of every

other kind of merchandise, so that there were no available berths for ships with general cargo and considerable loss and delay was the consequence.

To quote from « a letter from a member of the Board of Trade on the subject of the Harbour improvements : » « For » many years past the wharfage accommodation of Quebec has » been found to be but ill adapted to the requirements of our » trade. The deep water privileges appears to have been » conceded originally to the possessors of small properties on » the shore, who erected in front thereof wharves of greater » or less dimensions at all conceivable angles and depths of » water, which, however well suited to their own business » views at the time, and to the average size of vessels some » thirty years since, are, in their present somewhat improved » state, when the number and size of vessels visiting the port » are considered, but a sorry makeshift for any thing like » proper wharfage accommodation. »

The above extract from the published letter, is endorsed by the action of the Board of Trade of Quebec, a fact established by the introduction into that document of a passage from a report submitted to a general meeting of that body on the 6th of August 1856, and which was forwarded to the Executive, thereby fully proving that the wharfage accommodation was insufficient for the business of the Port.

After, it would seem, repeated applications to the government, a Harbour Commission was appointed, and fortunately to the satisfaction of the writer of the letter alluded to ; but with the admission on his part of satisfaction as to the composition of the Commission ends his approval, and the acts of the Harbour Commissioners receive his censure.

Without desiring in any way to stand forward as champions and defenders of the proceedings of the Commission, let us quietly see if common sense, will not prove their conduct to have been based on sound and practical views of the requirements of the case, and their acts themselves speak better

in their favour than any panegyric though written by the ablest pen.

Another quotation from the letter may be here inserted :
 » immediately on commencing their duties, the Harbour
 » Commissioners seem to have entered into a negocia-
 » tion for the purchase of the property known as Oliver's
 » wharf. There is probably no great reason to doubt the
 » prudence of this purchase itself, or to find fault with the
 » price paid, even though it be a considerable advance (here
 » the writer is in error) on the price of which it was acquired,
 » but a very short time previous to the resale to the Commis-
 » sioners.» With regard to the foregoing a few words will
 suffice. The Act of Parliament forming the Commission
 grants all the estuary of the St. Charles to them, outside a
 certain line known as the Commissioners line, but without
 owning some property between that line and the city there
 could be no access to it, and unless that property « Oliver's
 wharf » had been purchased in the first instance, the Commis-
 sioners, judging from the tone and tenor of the letter, would
 have been effectually debarred from obtaining such approaches
 as would render the Government grant of any value whatever,
 most wisely then they obtained possession of the property in
 question, and by so doing secured to the Commission the
 advantage of free and uninterrupted means of communication
 with the city. Before purchasing this property however the
 owners of wharves, lying between the Custom House and the
 new market, had been applied to and the prices of their prop-
 erties respectively asked for,—whether the prices asked were
 so large as to perclude their purchase remains to be seen—
 the Commissioners however purchased that which was abso-
 lutely required, and have not yet purchased that which is not
 so immediately wanted. The purchase of «Olivers wharf»
 having been made, it was obviously desirable to make it pro-
 fitable and that is exactly what they, the Commissioners, have
 proceeded to do. So far common sense speaks loudly in their
 favour.

Having glanced at the present state of the Harbour and found

that it is in a very unsatisfactory state and that some amelioration is absolutely necessary, not only with a view to obtain a new trade to the port, but also to render fit accommodation for what already exists, it will be well to consider what plan should be adopted to obtain the desired result.

Sheltered berths in sufficiently deep water with easy access and so constructed as not to interfere in any way with the navigation of the river are obviously what are required, at present there are but five berths in the Port of Quebec, that have any title to the name. Suppose, for arguments sake, that it be decided to purchase, say three of the properties on the St. Lawrence, namely Gillespies, Gibbs and Leaycrafts, and commence to make such ameliorations as may be possible in each of these, in what must they consist? as there is not space sufficient for this purpose along the river front, clearly, in projecting piers from the present ones out into the river.

The class of vessels which must be provided for, are, as the writer of the letter remarks, of a superior size to those using the port some thirty years ago, and the *Pride of Canada*, may be assumed as a standard. One berth for such a vessel must be at least equal to her length 225 feet, say it is desirable to berth six such ships, then in order to meet this amount and not interfere with the berths already in existence the piers must be at least 300 feet long each, and three piers will be required, for the idea of extending one pier only, of sufficient length to give the required accommodation could not for one moment be entertained, for the two manifest reasons of enormous cost and interruption to the general navigation of the river. Assuming then that three piers must be constructed, and the three properties mentioned, namely Gillespies, Gibbs and Leaycrafts are selected, let us proceed to count the cost of this operation. Commencing at Gillespie's the depth of water in front of the existing pier is 34 feet at low water, at 300 feet out it is 58 feet, the mean is 46, to this must be added 25 feet from low water to top of the pier, making a total height of 71 feet. Assuming 60 feet as the width of the pier at the top and

that it is necessary to have the sides formed with a slope, to allow of the rise of the ice in winter, of one in five, the width of the bottom would be 88.4 feet and the mean width would be 74.2 feet which multiplied by the mean height and again by the length would give 58,535 cubic yards, taking the estimate of the celebrated Engineer, who self denial is « never-to-be-too-much-commended, » of the cost of such works namely one dollar and forty cents per cubic yard, which in such deep water would be a low estimate, we have the sum of \$81,949, or £20,487 10s., for the first two berths.

Next in order comes Gibb's pier, at the end of this there is 40 feet, at 300 feet out 60 feet giving a mean of 50, apply the same process of calculation and the result is for these two berths a cost of \$87,500, or £23,750.

Lastly Leaycrafts, here are find 30 feet and 60 respectively, giving a mean of 45 feet and calculating as before the cost for the two last berths will be found to amount to \$80,570, or £20,142 10. Making a total of £64,380 for berths for six ships, to this must be added the sums asked by the proprietors for these properties, which we may set down in round numbers at £45,000, which added to the cost of the piers makes this arrangement amount to £109,380.

The amount stated as being required to carry out the enlarged views of the letter writer contained in the following paragraph : « It would obviously be more prudent to purchase three or four of the present wharves, situated, say immediately above the Custom House, » would have yet further to be encreased before the experiment, as he is pleased to term the action of the Commissioners, could be tested, and with the interest of such a sum to be provided and with so limited an amount of accommodation, what possible business could be carried on with any hope of success,—the proposal therefore of purchase and improvement « immediately above the Custom House » must for the present be abandoned and some other scheme, which would be self supporting at any rate, must be adopted.

Without attempting to argue upon a fact which has been established beyond a question, namely that a road must be made before it can be used, or that merchandise cannot be conveyed without means, although a contrary position seems to be assumed in the following extract «from the letter referred to, » doubtless there are people sanguine enough to contend that » there is an enormous western trade waiting at our doors, and » that some «encouragement» only is required in order to » obtain it, and the Commissioners may imagine that this » encouragement» consists merely in the provision of what, » after all, are soundary matters, *wharves, elevators, and ware-* » *houses,* » steamboats railroads and canals might with equal justice have been added to his list of secondary matters, it may be asserted that if there is one fact more clearly demonstrated than another, it is that facilities make trade and not trade facilities. The history of the commercial world during the last 30 years has been one long and uninterrupted proof that whenever facilities have been made, trade has followed, and did we want further corroboration, the simple fact of the present state of this port would most amply prove that the absence of facilities deters trade,—an assertion which has been made to the citizens of Montreal by one of their members.

The Chief Commissioner of Public Works, in his general report for 1860, says : « It is unnecessary to dwell upon » the importance to the trade of the St. Lawrence, of having » «proper facilities» for receiving, storing, and transshipping » grain and other produce, or to recount the inconvenience » and loss it has sustained during the past season for want of » them. The mere fact that the railway, although it reaches » the city (Montreal), *which is the head of Ocean Navigation,* » possesses none of these facilities, and is, as yet, uncon- » nected with the Harbour, is sufficient, of itself, to make » manifest that a radical defect in the traffic arrangements re- » mains to be remedied, and a great want to be supplied.»

A scheme combining all the requirements mentioned above

namely sheltered berths with sufficiently deep water, of easy access, and so constructed as not to interfere with the navigation of the river, has been formed and is now before the public. This scheme contemplates the improvement and enlargement of the Harbour or Port of Quebec, in that portion of it at present *unoccupied and unproductive*, by providing a basin of nearly 12 acres in extent surrounded by a wharf or piers, in 22 feet depth of water, sheltered from the prevailing winds, of easy access at all times of tide, with a pier in the middle on which elevators and warehouses would be constructed and where cargoes could be landed and transferred at all times, this scheme provides a wharfage of 2925 feet in length, and not being affected by the current allows of outside or stage berths, supplying berths for 16 large ships, 4 large propellers and many smaller berths for light craft.

This work can be executed for less than two thirds of the former scheme, being in shallower water, more accessible, already the property of the Commission and permitting of a much more simple method of construction, in addition to which it provides for the reception of ships ballast and allows of the formation of ballast berths which no other scheme can supply.

The question of what is to be done with the ballast annually brought to this Port, is one which must be speedily settled. During the last 30 years the bottom of the river at the ballast ground has been raised 43 feet and this process is going on at the rate of eighteen inches per year, as we are informed on the authority of the Admiralty Surveyor, Capt. Orlebar, R. N. If the Commissioners of the Harbour do not take this matter up, the British Government will be compelled to do so for neglect will be attended with results of a character altogether so important as to render such a step absolutely necessary. For twenty years past the average annual deposit has amounted to the enormous quantity of 220,000 tons, and this as is well known has already caused great inconvenience—to the extent of rendering one of the most valuable properties in the vicinity

of the ballast ground comparatively unavailable. In his evident anxiety to aid in the sale of certain wharves the very able writer of the letter referred to, has altogether overlooked *this small matter of the ballast*, a subject however of more real importance to the welfare of the Port than the purchase of all the river frontage.

In the construction of wharves one important item is the filling ; in the case of the three piers proposed to be constructed from those already in existence, there is no opportunity for utilising the ballast as the piers must be completed without the delay and interruption to trade which ships discharging ballast necessarily cause—and even if any number of ships could by any possibility be brought alongside, the piers would not absorb one years supply,—and after all some other means would have to be found for getting rid of it. In the case of the proposed improvements below the Custom House (be it remembered « on the St. Lawrence » and not « up the St. Charles ») preparation is made for taking the ballast and rendering that which is now actually injurious, a source of profit and a mean of increasing the capacity and importance of the Port—this will offer a receptacle for the ballast for many years to come, that would not take one years supply, where it possible even to get the ships to the piers. The scheme of experimentalising on a small scale, as the result has shewn, was erroneous thirty years ago—what would such a line of conduct appear to the world in 1861.

Already the « myth » facetiously so termed, is at our doors, and we have no means of accommodating the first proposed instalment of the Western trade, men of energy and intelligence are amongst us offering a share of this « mythical trade, » and we cannot embrace it, and why ? simply because we have no piers elevators or warehouses, « no secondary matters » in fact, and no energy or enterprise amongst as to commence their preparation even at this eleventh hour.

It does not require a prophets eye to foresee or a prophets pen to describe what the result must inevitably be—if Quebec

spurns the idea of encreased commerce, there are men of intellect and energy, who will gladly and quickly too accept the proffered prize for Point Lévi ; and should they be unable to profit by the chance, Montreal is ready and waiting for the opportunity to embrace it.

To sum up the whole question in few words, if it be desirable to encrease the facilities for commerce in the Port of Quebec at all, it is essential that the necessary improvements should be made in such a manner as to be efficient and profitable, and commenced without delay ; of the schemes proposed one would decidedly meet the requirements of the case, the other would be a mere mockery and would entail ruin and disappointment on all concerned.—That a very large trade will be done by means of the St. Lawrence route between Europe and the Western portion of this continent is no longer a matter of speculation, the only question is, what share or interest in the matter is the Port of Quebec to have.

It is hoped that a consideration of the foregoing remarks, will induce those who are owners of real estate, in this City and Port, to consider the importance of the matters now submitted to them and give their aid in once more placing the ancient City of Quebec, in that position which she is entitled to occupy.

